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New York

President:	Mr. Lavrov	(Russian Federation)
Members:	Austria	Mr. Spindelegger
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Yoda
	China	Mr. Zhang Yesui
	Costa Rica	Mr. Stagno Ugarte
	Croatia	Mr. Božinović
	France	Mr. Kouchner
	Japan	Mr. Ito
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Shalgham
	Mexico	Mr. Heller
	Turkey	Mr. Davutoğlu
	Uganda	Mr. Rugunda
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Miliband
	United States of America	Ms. Rice
	Viet Nam	Mr. Le Luong Minh

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Russian*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

I should now like to make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Russian Federation.

First and foremost, I should like to express my gratitude to all my colleagues who have accepted our invitation to attend today's meeting. My special gratitude goes to the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and other representatives who have come from their capitals, as well as, of course, to the Secretary-General for his personal participation in today's meeting.

The Security Council last met in today's format not long ago. In December 2008, the Council held a ministerial meeting at which it adopted resolution 1850 (2008), in which we unanimously expressed our understanding that progress towards the establishment of peace and stability should continue and that it should be comprehensive, cover all negotiating tracks, and be based on commonly accepted decisions and principles anchored in international law.

However, an alarming negotiating vacuum has arisen as a result of well-known causes, including the eruption of violence, the Gaza crisis at the beginning of the year and the elections and the extended time it took to form a new Government in Israel.

I believe that, in the current circumstances, the most important thing is the rapid resumption of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. It is of primary importance that the political process not be relaunched from the baseline, but that it should benefit from the available decisions of the international community and the agreements and understandings already achieved between the sides.

That is why one of the most pressing tasks is to reaffirm the international legal basis for the settlement of the Palestinian question, first and foremost on the basis of the two-State principle, which will lead to an independent, viable Palestinian Government, living side by side in peace with Israel. Of special importance, we believe, is the support expressed for the Arab Peace Initiative at the recent League of Arab States summit held in Doha. Together with resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), other relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference and the Road Map, the Arab Peace Initiative has become an integral part of the basis for building a new Middle East — a Middle East in which there will be no place for occupation or terrorism, but in which mutually beneficial and respectful cooperation between sovereign States and equal peoples will prevail.

It is clear that the path towards this objective will be a difficult one. The focus of our attention should be the situation in the region. It is essential to achieve clear compliance by the Palestinians and Israelis with their commitment to fighting terrorism and violence and to avoiding any unilateral action to prejudice a final status settlement, including the cessation of settlement activities and ensuring freedom of movement for the Palestinian population in the West Bank.

A great deal will depend on the success of the inter-Palestinian dialogue. The relevant efforts by Egypt should, in our view, continue to enjoy the full support of the international community. The restoration of Palestinian unity on the basis of the platform of the Palestine Liberation Organization and adherence to the Arab Peace Initiative are the only keys to meeting the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people and to progress in the Middle East peace process on the basis of the proposals arrived at by the Quartet in the context of the United Nations.

In accordance with the aforementioned considerations, we have prepared a draft presidential statement, which we propose to adopt as an outcome document of today's meeting. I would like to thank all our colleagues, who have made substantial contributions to the agreed text. We, along with the entire international community, have the responsibility of ensuring the viability of the peace process, promoting its rapid resumption and ensuring that it is acceptable to all. Work towards this goal should not be hampered by emotions.

The next step in our common efforts will be the Moscow conference on the Middle East. There is broad

international consensus in favour of that forum, as enshrined in Security Council resolutions and the decisions of the Middle East Quartet. During the course of the preparation of practical aspects of the Moscow conference, we are of course taking into account the views of the main stakeholders — the Palestinian, Israeli, Syrian and Lebanese people. With their support, for which we are grateful, the date and substantive part of the Moscow forum have been agreed. The conference stands to make a substantial contribution to the overall settlement of the Palestinian question and to bringing peace, security and stability to all peoples and Governments of the Middle East.

I now resume my function as President of this Council.

I welcome His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to this meeting, and I give him the floor.

The Secretary-General: The Council meets at the outset of a very important few weeks for the cause of peace in the Middle East. In this regard, I welcome and appreciate the participation of many distinguished ministers in this meeting, and I appreciate the initiative of the Russian presidency.

After the inconclusive results of last year's negotiations and the bloodshed in Gaza, the past three months have witnessed almost no progress on the two key resolutions, resolutions 1850 (2008) and 1860 (2009), recently adopted by this Council. I hope that this meeting today will help provide direction and momentum.

In the period ahead, United States President Obama will host the Israeli and Palestinian leaders and key regional parties in Washington, D.C. I expect the Quartet to meet soon and to consult closely with members of the League of Arab States. The challenge is to begin implementing transformative changes on the ground and to kick-start a renewed and irreversible drive to achieve an Israeli-Palestinian agreement. The ultimate objective remains the emergence of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security with Israel, and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region.

Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is fundamental to the well-being of both peoples, the region and the world. This Council, the Quartet, States in the region, the international community as a whole and I as Secretary-General must each play our full role. Security Council resolutions, previous agreements and obligations, and the Arab Peace Initiative give us the framework we need. We should be as determined as we are patient, as insistent as we are supportive, and as principled as we are empathetic to the very real concerns of both parties. The parties need confidence that the process will address their vital interests. For that, they need confidence that commitments made will be commitments monitored and commitments kept.

In this regard, I believe that there is a deep crisis of confidence among ordinary people on the ground, and for good reason. Palestinians continue to see unacceptable unilateral actions in East Jerusalem and the remainder of the West Bank — house demolitions, intensified settlement activity, settler violence and oppressive movement restrictions due to permits, checkpoints and the barrier, which are intimately connected to settlements. The time has come for Israel to fundamentally change its policies in this regard, as it has repeatedly promised to do but has not yet done. Action on the ground, together with a genuine readiness to negotiate on all core issues, including Jerusalem, borders and refugees, based on Israel's existing commitments, will be the true tests of Israel's commitment to the two-State solution.

Ordinary Israelis continue to seek reassurance that a future Palestinian State will guarantee their right to live in peace and security. In this respect, indiscriminate rocket attacks that have caused loss of life, civilian suffering and damage to property in Israel are not only deeply unacceptable, but also totally counterproductive, and must cease. The Palestinian Authority must continue its efforts to consolidate progress in developing and deploying an effective security structure and the functioning institutions of a future State — work that Israel must facilitate. For its part, Israel should refrain from using excessive force that kills and injures civilians, as it did during the recent conflict in Gaza with such devastating consequences. Firm and full respect for international humanitarian law by all parties is indispensable.

The beginning of Palestinian self-empowerment has been a key achievement of this past year's efforts and must not be imperilled by the financial crisis facing the Palestinian Authority. I appeal to donors, including in the region, to urgently meet unfulfilled commitments, including for budget support and Gaza's reconstruction.

I remain extremely worried about the situation in and around Gaza, with internal Palestinian divisions and Israeli-Hamas tensions trapping the civilian population in a vortex of hopelessness. The United Nations continues to fully support Egypt's efforts to achieve reconciliation among Palestinian groups and is ready to engage with a Government that unites Gaza and the West Bank within the framework of the legitimate Palestinian Authority. As an interim measure, we would also welcome the establishment of practical mechanisms that could help Palestinians in Gaza focus on reconstruction, security issues and preparations for elections.

I am convinced that the policy of continued closure of the Gaza Strip does not weaken Israel's adversaries in Gaza, but does untold damage to the fabric of civilian life. Nearly four months after the conflict, in which 3,800 houses and two health-care centres were destroyed, and 34,000 homes, 15 hospitals, 41 health-care centres and 282 schools sustained varying degrees of damage, we cannot get anything beyond food and medicine into Gaza to assist a population that had been in the midst of a war zone. This is completely unacceptable.

I call on Israel to respond positively to repeated calls to allow glass, cement and building materials into Gaza. In the aftermath of the war and given the level of human suffering now evident on the ground, I seek the support of all members of this Council and the Quartet for the United Nations efforts in Gaza. We are ready to work with local businessmen to help start action to repair and rebuild houses, schools and clinics. I can assure all Council members that we will continue to ensure the full integrity of programmes and projects.

Indeed, the provisions of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) — a durable and fully respected ceasefire, prevention of the illicit supply of weapons to Gaza, the reopening of the crossings in accordance with the Agreement on Movement and Access, and progress on Palestinian reconciliation under the legitimate Palestinian Authority — must be fulfilled. Efforts on these elements, as well as a prisoner exchange, remain the only way of meaningfully altering the dynamics on the ground for the better.

Finally, let me emphasize the important regional context. Arab countries have reaffirmed their commitment to the Arab Peace Initiative, which offers Israel the opportunity for acceptance and security within the region on the basis of land for peace. This remains a key framework around which a comprehensive approach to peace can and must be built. I continue to believe strongly in the potential for activating the regional tracks of the peace process, alongside a rejuvenated Palestinian track, including between Israel and Syria, on the basis of land for peace. I support the convening of an international conference in Moscow. I also look to Arab and regional countries to play a positive role regarding the internal Palestinian situation by urging all parties to turn away from violence and weapons acquisition and towards reunification under one Palestinian Authority committed to the principles of the Palestine Liberation Organization and, indeed, to the Arab Peace Initiative itself.

Like a bicycle that falls over when left at a standstill, the situation on the ground could easily deteriorate unless proper direction is given and real momentum is quickly generated. Violence and terror will not bring the Palestinians statehood and dignity, and settlement expansion and closure will not bring Israel security or peace. And no two-State solution can be reached if the situation between Gaza and southern Israel continues on its present destructive course or if Palestinians remain permanently divided.

I call on the parties to honour all existing agreements and previous commitments and to pursue an irreversible effort towards the two-State solution, including by fully implementing commitments on the ground. I also believe that the international community's credibility is at stake. We are a long way from where we hoped to be when we embarked on a fresh push for peace less than two years ago. However, I take heart that there is a deep consensus about the scale of the challenge and the importance of meeting it. Let us move forward with confidence and resolve, knowing that, if we rise to our responsibilities, we will help the parties rise to theirs, too.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Michael Spindelegger, Federal Minister for European and International Affairs of Austria.

Mr. Spindelegger (Austria): I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing on the developments on the ground, and Minister Lavrov for his initiative of bringing us together.

Four and a half months ago, with the tragic violent confrontation in and around the Gaza Strip ongoing, we met here facing an unprecedented challenge to the Middle East peace process. The Security Council adopted a resolution calling for an immediate and durable ceasefire and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza. Even though a fragile ceasefire is in place today, we have seen no further progress at the political, security and economic levels. The parties and the international community are thus confronted with the urgent need to create the conditions for relaunching a credible and comprehensive peace process.

Our discussion is taking place at an important moment for the future of the region. The new Government of Israel is engaged in a strategic review of its approach towards it neighbours and the peace process. Palestinians have to face the challenge of bridging their deep internal rift, agree on unification and prepare for new elections in order to give new democratic legitimacy to their leadership.

In this period of uncertainty and transition, the international community must shoulder its responsibility and engage with the parties in order to move towards substantive negotiations for a lasting settlement of the Middle East conflict. Therefore, the Security Council must reconfirm its steadfast support for the peace process and its basic parameters: durable peace and freedom from violence and terrorism based on a two-State solution, as required by the Road Map, with two democratic States — Israel and Palestine — living side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders. I would like to thank the Russian presidency for preparing a statement that will, we hope, serve as a guideline to the parties for re-engaging in comprehensive negotiations on all tracks.

Three months ago, at the Gaza reconstruction conference, the international community pledged its full support for humanitarian relief to the civilian population and to early reconstruction of the Gaza Strip. The Secretary-General's report leaves no doubt that there is an unacceptable lack of progress in alleviating the dire living conditions in the Gaza Strip. While Austria supports coordinated action by all parties concerned to prevent the illegal flow of arms and ammunition into the Gaza Strip, we urgently call on Israel to allow for the immediate and comprehensive supply to the civilian population of the Gaza Strip of goods to satisfy everyday needs and the requirements of reconstruction. The Gaza Strip needs fuel, cash and materials to repair schools, clinics, sanitation networks and shelters.

With its European Union partners, Austria has contributed funds to be disbursed by the European Commission to socially vulnerable Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Under the current circumstances, that money simply cannot be disbursed to those whom we want to support. Innocent citizens must not be held hostage by Israel because of the irresponsible policies of an illegitimate political leadership in the Gaza Strip. Let me say this very clearly: the current policies imposed on the Gaza Strip deprive its people of their human dignity. That is not acceptable.

Rebuilding Gaza and moving forward on the path to peace also require rebuilding trust, including by strengthening respect for the rule of law, human rights and international humanitarian law. In that context, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for having provided us with a summary of the findings of the Board of Inquiry on a number of deeply disturbing incidents during the Gaza crisis. As a matter of principle, allegations of violations of international humanitarian law must be investigated, wherever they occur and whoever may have committed them. Austria believes that this report also merits follow-up by the Council.

We are concerned about the lack of political progress in the West Bank, where Israeli roadblocks and closure policies continue to render normal social life and economic activities impossible. Settlement construction and the destruction of Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem and in the West Bank undermine any meaningful peace talks and, in consequence, weaken the credibility of the political process and play into the hands of radical forces.

At the same time, we urgently call on Palestinian political representatives to assume their responsibility and to seriously engage in efforts to work towards unified political leadership. In view of upcoming round of talks in Cairo, we strongly encourage intra-Palestinian reconciliation behind President Mahmoud Abbas, which is key not only for the future of the peace process but also for the implementation of reconstruction efforts in Gaza. Palestinians need a Government that enjoys legitimacy among their own population and is acceptable as a partner to Israel and to the international community. Such a Government

needs to be fully committed to the two-State solution and the other principles of the peace process.

.In their efforts towards lasting peace in the region, the parties have the firm support of the international community, with the Security Council and the Middle East Quartet as its main actors. The international conference on the Middle East peace process that the Russian Federation plans to convene in Moscow in the course of this year in consultation with the Quartet and the parties will provide the international community with another important occasion to demonstrate that support.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Bedouma Alain Yoda, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Burkina Faso.

Mr. Yoda (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): My delegation would like at the outset, Mr. President, to thank you and the delegation of the Russian Federation for having taken the initiative to organize this meeting, thus giving us the opportunity to consider the important issue of the situation in the Middle East, of which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the main Gordian knot. We are convinced that our deliberations, in which Burkina Faso is pleased to take part, will be fruitful and will contribute to the search for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution.

Allow me, in that regard, Sir, to pay tribute to the important role that your country plays in that joint endeavour, which you have reaffirmed by offering to host an international conference on the Middle East in Moscow this year. We support that proposal, and we have no doubt that the outcome of the planned meeting will be commensurate with our expectations. I would also like to welcome the presence among us of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who has never spared any efforts in helping to resolve the conflict in the Middle East. I also congratulate him on his important remarks this morning.

No one can deny today that the peace, security and stability of the Middle East are an important component — indeed that they are at the heart — of international peace and security. Thus, it is the duty of the international community, with the Security Council in the lead, and in all our interests to make every effort to ensure that calm prevails in that region.

Unfortunately, the events of recent months have powerfully shaken the foundations of the admittedly modest progress that the peace process had so painstakingly achieved. The war in Gaza and the attendant grave humanitarian suffering, the ever-increasing violence and the threats issued by parties to the conflict are all factors that have complicated, indeed halted, the momentum of the ongoing dialogue established by the Annapolis Conference.

However, by adopting resolution 1850 (2008), the Security Council marked its resolute commitment to the irreversibility of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiating process started at Annapolis. For Burkina Faso, in letter and in spirit, that resolution and the other relevant Council resolutions, including resolution 1860 (2009), remain relevant, and we call for their full implementation.

We would also like to reaffirm the importance, in our view, of the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, and we welcome the endeavours of the Quartet. Convinced that those are today the most appropriate political and legal frameworks for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the conflict in the Middle East, we urge the parties to abide by them and once and for all to permanently forsake recourse to arms in order to resolutely commit in good faith to direct talks.

Moreover, my delegation believes that those talks must be irreversible and nurtured by a single vision: that of a peaceful region, in the building of which an independent, viable Palestinian State, with secure and internationally recognized borders, living side and by side in peace with the State of Israel, itself living in peace with all its neighbours, will fully participate.

That, we believe, is the price to pay. We know that the Israelis and Palestinians are capable of paying it, having, in 2008, proved the desire to resolve their dispute, including by maintaining ongoing contact and by diligently pursuing their negotiations. We are thus convinced that, this time again, they can overcome the present circumstances and renew the thread of dialogue, which the whole international community urges with all its heart.

That involves a first step, perhaps the most difficult, but certainly the most indispensable: that of establishing a genuine climate of trust by adopting the necessary measures, namely an end to extremist rhetoric by all sides; a halt to Israel's construction of the separation wall and to its settlement policies; the lifting of the Gaza blockade; and guarantees of

humanitarian access. It also means Hamas ceasing its rocket fire and other forms of violence on Israeli territory.

Furthermore, in order to optimize their participation in the talks and to draw the maximum benefit from them, it is essential and urgent that the Palestinians achieve their unity. That is why we are particularly grateful to Egypt for its commitment and its untiring efforts to help the Palestinian brethren achieve reconciliation, and we call on the international community to support these initiatives.

While emphasizing the need for medium- and long-term solutions to the conflict, we cannot ignore the current situation of the people of Gaza, for whom the most urgent issues today are resolving the humanitarian crisis and carrying out reconstruction. The pledging conference held in Sharm el-Sheikh on 2 March 2009 enabled the donor community to become involved in those crucial issues. We hope that promises will be translated into concrete action. Likewise, humanitarian aid and construction materials should be able to reach Gaza unimpeded. Similar efforts should be made throughout the occupied Palestinian territories.

Clearly, the challenges to be met in the Middle East are still great and the expectations even greater. Indeed, with the exception of the hopes aroused by Lebanon, including the improvement in Syrian-Lebanese relations, the Middle East, unfortunately, remains in the grip of many tensions and the option of political coexistence between Israel and its Arab neighbours has yet to be put to the test. Nevertheless, we remain convinced that the aspiration to peace and security for them and for future generations will prevail over bellicose behaviour and the mindset of confrontation.

Because the stability of the entire region remains dependent on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is essential to devote unflagging attention to it. In addition, the countries in the region and beyond must continue diplomatic initiatives in support of the parties' efforts. In that respect, the Security Council has a primary role to play, including by finding ways to ensure compliance with the many decisions that it has adopted since this conflict was included among the priority issues on its agenda. Its credibility and that of the United Nations system as a whole are at stake.

Finally, the solution of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East is unthinkable without the determination of the parties themselves. We therefore invite them to show greater political will and a heightened sense of their responsibilities.

In conclusion, we should like to thank you, Mr. President, for having submitted to the Council a draft presidential statement that we support.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey.

Mr. Davutoğlu (Turkey): First, I would like to thank the Russian Federation and Minister Lavrov for convening this timely meeting, which has provided us with the opportunity to exchange views on recent developments in the Middle East. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for his statement regarding the current situation on the ground.

The dynamism of events and the pace of developments in the Middle East require the international community to be alert and active at all times. Despite all the frustrating problems in the region, we believe that there is no room for pessimism. On the contrary, recent diplomatic activities and the determination of the international community to attain the ultimate objective of establishing peace and stability in the region have raised our hopes for the future.

As the problems in the region have become interrelated, it is no longer feasible to address them in isolation. We therefore need a comprehensive approach and believe that the peace process should be reinvigorated on all tracks without further delay.

The Palestinian problem and the Arab-Israeli conflict are at the top of our agenda. The rift among Palestinians has to come to an end. Palestinian groups have to find common ground so as to tackle outstanding issues, thus leading to a national unity Government and paving the way for the holding of presidential and legislative elections. The establishment of a strong Palestinian Administration with popular support is essential. Turkey hopes that national reconciliation talks between Palestinian groups will succeed, and we continue to support Egypt's efforts to that end.

We need to engage every Palestinian group that has the support of the Palestinian people and to ensure

that they all adhere to the principles of peace. In that context, we welcome the cessation of the launching of rockets as a positive and encouraging sign.

We hope that the new Government in Israel will adopt a policy that will restore hopes for the peace process and renew commitment to the two-State solution. On the other hand, we are concerned by certain policies that could seriously hamper peace efforts. Among them are Jewish settlement activities, restrictions on the movement of Palestinian people and goods, and actions and measures that could alter the character and status of Jerusalem and further isolate East Jerusalem from the rest of the Palestinian territory. All of these run counter to the parties' obligations under the Road Map, as well as to the spirit of Annapolis, and should be stopped. I would also like to emphasize that the Arab Peace Initiative provides a very sound basis for peace between Arab States and Israel, and that Israel should give the Initiative the attention that it deserves.

The presidential statement that we are going to adopt at the end of this meeting could have been more inclusive and precise. Nevertheless, we will join the consensus. However, I would like to clarify our interpretation and understanding of the text before us.

First, it must be emphasized that the objective of comprehensive peace can be achieved only through the reinvigoration of the peace process on all its tracks. Secondly, we cannot turn a blind eye to the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories, particularly in Gaza. In that context, it is good to refer to resolution 1860 (2009), but that is not enough. It is incumbent on us to call for the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) and to address the humanitarian situation in Gaza through the unimpeded provision and distribution of humanitarian assistance throughout the region.

One priority of Turkish foreign policy towards the region is to keep open the channels of dialogue with all parties and to pursue an active policy of engagement. We welcome the fact that a growing number of countries have come to realize the merits of that policy and have adopted similar approaches.

We are committed to continuing to contribute to efforts aimed at a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East based on the vision of a region in which two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders.

If hopes for peace are exhausted, that will only lead to further suffering of the peoples in the region and provide a fertile breeding ground for extremism and terrorism, which constitute a grave threat to all of us. From that perspective, it is my earnest hope that we will all be engaged in active diplomatic activities in the coming days. In that context, I look forward to the convening of an international conference on the Middle East peace process in Moscow in 2009.

Before concluding, I wish to emphasize the fact that the Israelis and the Palestinians are destined to live and work together. They can choose either to remain enemies and suffer together or to become good neighbours and friends and prosper together. It is high time that the right choice be made.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Bernard Kouchner, Minister for Foreign Affairs of France.

Mr. Kouchner (France) (*spoke in French*): I should like at the outset to thank Mr. Lavrov, as well as the Secretary-General for his encouraging words, and to tell members that we are not satisfied by the progress made. That progress has been insufficient, despite the efforts of many of the countries represented around this table.

Almost four months ago to the day, our countries met here to adopt an appeal for a lasting ceasefire in Gaza. Since then, the most difficult phase of the conflict has ended. I believe that our appeal and our efforts in New York contributed to that. However, most of the objectives set out in resolution 1860 (2009), to which all preceding speakers have referred, have not yet been attained, and we are far from attaining them.

First, the situation on the ground in Gaza remains extremely worrisome; that is a euphemism. Humanitarian workers and aid have barely entered the Gaza Strip. For the most part, the blockade is still in place. Reconstruction is impossible, or nearly impossible. Checkpoints should be opened in a lasting way for all goods; we have all requested that. There is also no lasting ceasefire, and rocket launches, though episodic, continue. Our compatriot Gilad Shalit and the Palestinian prisoners have not yet been released.

It is essential that Palestinians speak with a single voice. Inter-Palestinian reconciliation efforts under the

authority of President Abbas, in compliance with the principles that guide the peace process, must be successful. My country wishes once again to back the work of Egypt on this issue.

Finally — and this is the main objective of our meeting and the aspect that I would like to develop today — we have to again be in a position to turn to the future in order to achieve peace. The year 2008 started with hope, with a return to inter-Palestinian negotiations on the final status. Ultimately, it was not possible to keep to the timeline for the completion of those negotiations agreed upon in Annapolis, but resolution 1850 (2008) very clearly recalled the irreversibility of this process. We do not have to refer to it by the name of Annapolis.

The military operations in Gaza brutally interrupted the thread of negotiations. Must we therefore conclude that the time is not right to relaunch the peace process? No, no and no. If there is a message that France intends to share with the Council today, it is, on the contrary, the sense of urgency that should drive us — urgency because of the veritable ticking bomb that is the situation in Gaza Strip, urgency because of the critical financial situation of the Palestinian Authority, urgency because of the growing weariness of both the people of Palestine and the people of Israel, and finally, urgency because we must not lose track of the Palestinian elections planned for January 2010.

For us, the window of opportunity, as we say, is now one that is calculated in terms of months, not in years. Thus, we must step up our efforts to facilitate resumption of political negotiations that would lead to a comprehensive peace. For us, the existence and the security of Israel are not negotiable. However, we are just as firmly committed to achieving the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people, and in our view, only the creation of a sovereign Palestinian State will make it possible to combine these two objectives.

To be successful, peace must be moved forward by the leaders. Our friends have said that. However, the greatest attention must be paid to the second element. It is just as necessary that the peoples believe in the possibility of peace. They now no longer believe in it. Immediate measures in the field are necessary to create the right conditions for negotiations.

The continuation of Israeli settlement undermines on a daily basis the credibility of efforts aimed at a lasting solution by creating fait accomplis on the ground and insisting on splitting the West Bank into two parts and totally isolating East Jerusalem. As President Sarkozy stated when he spoke before the Knesset in June 2008, "There can be no peace without the immediate and complete cessation of settlement activities". The Government of Israel must hear this message — this friendly message: continuing settlement is one of the main obstacles in the field to peace and eventually poses a threat to the security of Israel. The presidential statement to be adopted at the end of our meeting would be stronger, in my view, if it took into account this essential issue.

France, of course, calls upon the Palestinian Authority to continue its efforts to combat terrorism. The actions of Salam Fayyad, former Prime Minister, in this area deserve tribute. Terrorism and attacks in all their forms, as well as the trafficking of weapons into Gaza, are all unacceptable and must come to an end.

A comprehensive regional approach is also needed through work, inter alia, on the Lebanese and Syrian tracks of the peace process. We cherish the hope that indirect negotiations between Syria and Israel may resume and that the question of the village of Gashar and Sheba'a Farms may be settled between Israel and the Government of Lebanon, under the aegis of the United Nations.

Beyond that, the whole region that must become involved in seeking peace. That is why we so greatly value the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative —2002! We are so far from that now — which takes into account seven interdependencies. We must think about the measures of trust and the acts necessary by one party or another to achieve the objectives set by that initiative.

To prepare for the future and for peace is also to accept working on the past, without fear. We cannot ignore today allegations of violations of international humanitarian law noted since the Gaza crisis. France backed the establishment by the Secretary-General of the Board of Inquiry on attacks against United Nations premises in Gaza. I have also indicated that France would back any investigation as long as it is impartial, independent and covers all violations of international humanitarian law regardless of who the victims are, be they Palestinian or Israeli civilians. In the light of the conclusions of the Board of Inquiry which have just been communicated to us, we will have to consider this issue in the next few days.

My final message is that stronger commitment by the international community is needed. Only such a commitment can guarantee that serious peace negotiations will resume and rapidly succeed. Only such a commitment provides the parties with assurance that the terms of an agreement will effectively be complied with, thanks to the direct contributions of third countries in the form of manpower, financial resources and guarantees. I know that meetings will be completed at the end of this month, which completion we await with impatience.

France and the European Union have on numerous occasions voiced their readiness to support and facilitate and, as necessary, to participate in negotiations and ponder the guarantees that a possible agreement might require. I note with much hope the intentions declared by the new American Administration. I wish to say to it here that we will be ready to work with the United States for a new dynamic, but it can wait no longer.

I said at the start that the matter is urgent need and, in that context, with all the arguments that I tried to emphasize, we bring our full support to the plan to organize a new international conference on the Middle East this year, as proposed by the Russian Federation.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to His Excellency The Right Honourable Mr. David Miliband, M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Miliband (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom warmly welcomes this debate, and we thank the Russian Federation for its initiative in opening it. We also thank the Secretary-General for his very strong words today.

This meeting comes just a week before the start of an intensive series of visits to Washington, as the new United States Administration fulfils its commitment to offer the leadership necessary to address both the insecurity of Israelis and the statelessness of the Palestinians. Today, our duty is not just to state national positions. It is to unite our commitment in word and deed to support the development of a new plan for peace.

After 61 years of temporary truce and bloody wars, it can sometimes seem inevitable that the conflict in the Middle East will continue for at least a few more years and that the best we can hope for is that it not get too much worse. But that logic is not faulty; it is dangerous. Conflict can erupt again a time.

The Gaza war showed how close to the su conflict is in the occupied Palestinian Terri Resolution 1860 (2009) was a hard-fought achieve that laid the basis for an end to the Gaza confli January. But there is, as many speakers have al said, overwhelming evidence that it is has not fully implemented. More work remains to be do reopen the crossings, to get humanitarian aid in a bring an end to arms smuggling. It is relevant t deliberations that the only people who gain from failure are those committed to violence. There are other outstanding issues arising from the Gaza including the Secretary-General's Board of In report on attacks on United Nations premises. We to the Israeli Government to investigate each of incidents in the light of the Inquiry's findings.

The West Bank, meanwhile, is in econ limbo. The Palestinian Authority is short of f Israeli settlement building continues, with demoli and settlements in East Jerusalem particu dangerous for peace. Meanwhile, rockets contin land in Israeli towns, the rearmament of Hizbollah contravention of resolution 1559 (2004), and exploits the misery of Palestinians to advance its goals. That is why the Secretary-General was rig his remarks this morning to refer to a crisi confidence.

President Obama has said that the status q unsustainable. We need to take that seri Destructive forces in the Middle East have de strength from the perceived inaction or initiatives of the international community. With decisive drive for peace, there will be a drift tow more war.

The Council is not short of consensus ab solution. We share the passion and conviction o French colleagues in setting this out. The broad has been clear for some time: a comprehensive p based on two States, agreed borders based on the 1967, Jerusalem as the capital for both States, a just settlement for refugees. As His Excellency Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey has expla all this is a catalyst for a resolution of other i dividing Israel from its neighbours.

Nor is there much argument about the short-term measures that would give life to hope among the people in Israel and the Palestinian territories. Palestinians want to see a freeze on all settlement activity, both in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, as per Road Map commitments, and the opening of crossings into Gaza not only for humanitarian aid, but also for reconstruction supplies and the movement of people and trade, as per resolution 1860 (2009). They also want to see the Palestinian Authority properly funded by all of its donors. The United Kingdom believes that they are right to want these things.

Israelis want to see an end to the threat of terror and the release of Gilad Shalit. Again, they are right to want these things. What has been missing is shared and sustained political will to overcome the obstacles, and now is the time to find it — too late for too many, but urgent nonetheless.

In this context, the creation of a new Israeli Government takes on added significance. Prime Minister Netanyahu leads a Government born of the democratic process. The United Kingdom welcomes his public commitments, restated today, to political, economic and security tracks. Progress on each one is vital, needs to be delineated and requires support.

Meanwhile, Israel has a willing partner for negotiations in President Abbas. The Palestinians need a Government. If the Egyptian-sponsored talks on Palestinian reconciliation are not to reach a conclusion, then we look forward to a new Government being formed with a clear commitment to the peaceful advance of the interests of the Palestinian people, as resolution 1850 (2008) envisaged, and above all a determination to improve their daily lives in advance of Palestinian elections. This, too, needs support.

But, Israelis and Palestinians cannot deliver this deal on their own. Israelis need peace with the whole Arab world, as well as cooperation with the Palestinians. Palestinians need support from the Arab world as well as compromise from Israel. This is the 23-State solution that we need, and is embodied in the Arab Peace Initiative, which is finally getting the recognition that it deserves. We applaud the vision and commitment of its principal author, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. We welcome the determination and fresh thinking of King Abdullah of Jordan to advance its goals.

The Arab Peace Initiative is in fact an Arab deposit that needs to be matched. The United Kingdom has been proud to play its part alongside other European countries, not just in arguing for a regional resolution to all outstanding issues, but also in supporting the economic and security strategies of the Palestinian Authority. There is no issue that will motivate Europeans more than the chance to support a drive for peace in the Middle East. The European deposit with all partners is an unyielding commitment to be a force for practical help — money, training, people, commitment — to all parties as they seek to prepare for and then implement a final deal.

There is also a Russian deposit — its commitment to work for an international conference to support a peace plan and your role in the E3+3 and in this Council in ensuring that Iran abides by its commitments to non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Since we last met in January, we have been in what for us has been a holding pattern. This has been understandable, but this, too, is a euphemism. For people of the region, it has been lost time, and anyone who thinks that a stable holding pattern can continue indefinitely is gravely mistaken. The people of the region do not need a new process; they need the confidence that comes from a plan, with the timelines and commitment to make it a reality. Our message to Israelis, Palestinians and the region must be clear and undivided. We support peace and we expect peace. The challenges ahead are indeed great. Bold decisions will be needed on all sides, but the consequences of inaction will be even more severe.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Bruno Stagno Ugarte, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Costa Rica.

Mr. Stagno Ugarte (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Once again, the Security Council is meeting to discuss an issue about which almost everything has already been said. Few situations have attracted as much attention, led to so many meetings, mobilized so many actors and generated as much disappointment and frustration as the situation in the Middle East. We are definitely facing a graveyard of lost opportunities in a region of the world that is saturated with history. However, we must not hesitate; on the contrary, we must continue to press forward. To that end, we trust that the debate to which the Russian Federation has invited us will produced added value.

My country believes that the international community must insist that the parties most directly concerned negotiate and accept from the outset that a final and definitive solution will not give them everything they hope for or claim, or even what they believe to be fair. The time has come to relinquish rigid positions based on the past — a past that no longer exists for either party, because the greatest injustice is that which has continued for more than six decades. We have lived through six decades of misunderstandings, confrontations, regression and disenchantment, occasionally interrupted by interludes or some progress that have led us to believe that peace was still possible. It has been six decades of intolerance and violence on both sides that have deprived both peoples of the right to live free of fear.

We all know that there are many obstacles on the path to peace; some seem insurmountable and cannot be overcome. But we cannot gloss over the fact that the behaviour of either party can affect the behaviour of the other, although it cannot justify it. Certainly, Costa Rica does not ignore the mutual interdependence among all of the fundamental elements of a final status agreement. Each obstacle and element deserves our full attention, but first and foremost the attention of the parties most directly involved: Israel and Palestine.

Costa Rica is convinced that the only possible peace is one that is agreed between the parties, with the international community strongly behind them and watching over the success of the negotiations. However, the international community must be committed to a solution, and not consider it an opportunity to gain diplomatic points, renew past lustre, or possibly derive some personal profit or even hold a letter of credit that might be redeemed in some future game of chess.

While we are all betting on the success of the Quartet, my country believes that it is time to recognize that the Road Map is fatally skewed. It is a Road Map to nowhere. It is an itinerary with stages and stops, but no clear goal or destination. For that reason, Costa Rica believes that the entire Road Map process should be addressed from another perspective — in other words, start from the perspective of the final stage. The parameters and outlines of a definitive solution must be crafted and made known from the outset with total clarity. The destination should be recognized as a guarantee for the necessary intermediate and temporary agreements that will promote definitive solution and make the process irreversible. All must be committed to the final goal. Otherwise, the Quartet will continue, to go in circles without any sense of direction.

Similarly, given that in the immediate and not-so-immediate neighbourhood there are so many actors wishing to obstruct the process, there is no reason to require that final negotiations resolve issues that are difficult but not fundamental and that have an impact on the process while not capable of resolving it. Such false logic has given those who thrive on intolerance and violence too many opportunities to sabotage the peace.

The frameworks of step-by-step negotiations have been a snare in which hope has often been trapped. That is why it is doubly important that the outlines of a final outcome be known in advance. Costa Rica understood this when on 5 February 2008 it recognized the State of Palestine, thus paying a historical debt, in particular because it was among the 33 countries that voted in favour of the partition resolution (General Assembly resolution 181 (II)). It is time for the international community — starting with those 33 countries, several of which are represented in this Chamber — to recognize the existence of two States and to support a final, peaceful solution to a situation that has already generated far too much intolerance and violence and which urgently requires closure in keeping with the best interests of the parties.

With such a bold gesture, we would strengthen the democratic Government of President Abbas and would place it in a position of greater symmetry vis-à-vis other parties to the conflict. In that way, on behalf of the Palestinian people and along with Israel, it would be in a position to chart the path towards a future free from violence for its people and for the entire region. Such a political gesture could become a symbol with the power to shape reality.

It is time to call the fundamental elements of the conflict by their proper names, and to support the parties in reaching lasting, concrete, verifiable and final agreements. That is the spirit of past efforts that we must retrieve. We must turn our attention to the parties concerned and their regional neighbours, who are the ones suffering the most from the consequences of the conflict. The more involved the parties concerned are in defining the elements of peace

initiatives, the greater their commitment to speedy and effective implementation.

That is a lesson that we in Central America can vouch for. Like the Israelis and the Palestinians, we had to undergo suffering to understand that the solution lay within ourselves and that, in the final analysis, it takes more courage to agree than to reject. In the meantime, we must immediately allow and facilitate unobstructed, continuous and timely access for humanitarian assistance to the population of the occupied Palestinian territories. Similarly, we must reverse the growth of illegal settlements, in conformity with agreements reached, avoiding any measure that would alter the demographic character of the occupied territories or cause deterioration in the living conditions of the Palestinians.

Also, Palestine must strengthen measures to combat violence, extremism and terrorism and must exercise control over its own territory.

In our view, two actors are indispensable in following up the process: the United States — particularly now, with a new Administration that believes in the audacity of hope and that has been linked to or associated with all efforts to find a solution — and the moderate Arab countries that are neighbours of the parties. Some of these countries have learned from the errors of the past and can become solid partners for peace. The two countries that have signed peace agreement with Israel — Egypt and Jordan — as well as Saudi Arabia, have a great deal to contribute. That is why Costa Rica considers that the Arab Peace Initiative is an important contribution in that regard.

Let me comment briefly on the draft presidential statement on which we have been working. We will be flexible in order not to prevent its adoption, but let me note that we would have preferred clearer and more resolute emphasis on and support for the Arab Peace Initiative, and a recognition of the Initiative for what it is: in Mr. Miliband's words, a "deposit that needs to be matched" (*supra*). We would also have preferred more precise direction for the work of the Quartet and we would have preferred to somewhat reorder the paragraphs. But we are satisfied at the acceptance of our request for the elimination of any reference to a preparatory process for Palestine to acquire full statehood: as I have said, my country already recognizes the State of Palestine.

The time has come to start with the ultimate goal of two independent States living side by side in peace and security. The time has come to put an end to the cruel irony that the only democratic Arab State is living under the oppression of foreign occupation. The time has come to put an end to a situation that, if unresolved, will only encourage extremists and that has strengthened, among others, the deniers in Tehran.

We will never stop saying that in the Middle East there can be no final victory of one over the other. Peace is the fruit of endeavours by moderate voices that accept the coexistence, side by side, of two independent States living in peace and security.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Susan Rice, Permanent Representative of the United States of America and member of President Obama's Cabinet.

Ms. Rice (United States of America): We are grateful to the Secretary-General for his report.

As much as I very much like Ambassador Churkin, it is an honour to have you, Foreign Minister Lavrov, in the Chair today. We thank you for convening this important meeting of the Security Council, and we welcome especially Russia's initiative to craft a constructive statement by the Council President, to be released today, which the United States is pleased to support.

This meeting of the Council underscores the priority that the international community places on achieving a secure, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. That must include a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security. The United States has already revitalized its efforts to make real that vision of a comprehensive peace between Israel and its Arab neighbours, and we will continue to pursue it vigorously in the months ahead.

President Obama is personally committed to this goal, and he continues to lead directly on this issue. As the President noted in his recent address to the Turkish parliament, the parties have also committed themselves to those goals, in the Road Map and at Annapolis. Our interest lies not in a lengthy, drawn-out process, but in real results. We must not tarry. Lasting progress can be made if we lift our sights and look to a future of peace: to a Middle East in which Israel lives in peace and

security alongside its Arab neighbours; to a region in which the fruits of peace are cherished by all.

As President Obama has noted, terrorism and rocket fire aimed at innocent Israelis are simply intolerable. And a future without hope and opportunity for the Palestinians is intolerable as well. Towards that end, my Government's distinguished and determined Special Envoy for the Middle East, Senator George Mitchell, recently completed his third trip to the region. He is working intensively with our Israeli and Arab partners, as well as our friends throughout the international community, towards a very clear purpose: to help create the conditions for a peaceful resolution to the conflict and for the establishment of an independent, viable Palestinian State.

In addition to moving forward with the parties, his work is also designed to prevent any new outbreak of violence, which could further destabilize the region, hinder our collective efforts and claim more innocent civilian lives. To further advance this cause, President Obama will be meeting with key regional leaders over the course of the next several weeks. We very much look forward to those constructive talks, and we look forward to discussing ways in which the international community can support these efforts with our Quartet partners and other friends and allies. The Quartet remains the most effective instrument for advancing the international community's engagement in the effort to bring lasting peace to the Middle East.

As we move to create a climate for meaningful negotiations, all parties must meet their obligations under the Road Map. The Palestinian Authority must combat terrorism and incitement directed at Israel. The United States and its partners have provided funding and training for a reformed Palestinian security force, which has recently provided impressive demonstrations of its professionalism and effectiveness.

For its part, Israel must halt settlement activity and dismantle outposts erected since March 2001. Israel must also allow the Palestinians freedom of movement, increased security responsibilities and access to economic opportunities.

All States in the region must now consider steps that they can take to create an atmosphere that will help foster successful negotiations. That is one reason why we intend to integrate the Arab Peace Initiative into our own approach. In this spirit we welcome the remarks made by King Abdullah of Jordan during his productive recent visit to Washington. As he noted, United States cannot be left to do all the heavy lif by itself, and other countries, including Jordan, sh do all that they can to shore up our common efforts

We must also work together to support fully Palestinian Authority as it continues its effort improve the lives of ordinary Palestinians throug the West Bank and Gaza. It is doing so through partisan, transparent programmes. Indeed, the W Bank and the International Monetary Fund endorsed the Authority's budgetary and fina controls in accounting for the $1.7 billion it rece from all donors in 2008. The international commu must continue to support the legitimate Palest leadership. States in the region have a parti responsibility.

President Abbas, Prime Minister Fayyad an Palestinian Authority must be able to demonstra the Palestinian people that negotiations, not terr and violence, are the path to an independent and v Palestinian State.

In this context, let me turn to the Q principles: renouncing violence, recognizing Israel respecting past obligations. The United States h that all United Nations Members, especially States, will recognize what these principles repre They are the essential building blocks of a f Palestinian State. Palestinian reconciliation on t that do not uphold the Quartet principles would only to delay the day when the Palestinians' legiti aspirations for statehood become real.

My Government also values Egypt's leadersh the region and its support for peace. All United Na Member States, including those in the region, work together to ensure the end of the illicit smug of arms and ammunition into Gaza, lest Hamas re its arsenal and spark further conflict. We str support reopening Gaza's border crossings controlled, sustained and continuous manner wi appropriate monitoring regime involving internat and Palestinian Authority participation. That ca achieved through dialogue focused on meeting pre humanitarian needs. It will not happen through ter intimidation and violence.

Separately, we also look forward to the upco elections in Lebanon, which must be free, fai unmarred by violence, intimidation and o influence. We need to continue to support th

implementation of Security Council resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006) in order to protect Lebanon's hard-won sovereignty and independence. We must continue to insist on an end to weapons-smuggling and on the disarmament of all militias in Lebanon, including Hezbollah.

It should be the role of all of us to help the parties move forward in pursuit of peace and to do nothing to hinder their efforts. We must look beyond the smoke of war and avoid the easy temptations of recrimination and rancour. Together we must focus on a shared vision of peace and security. The stakes are high. Our actions will help determine what kind of future the children of the Middle East will inherit — whether they will be able to look ahead to a hopeful, prosperous future, or whether they will be forced to endure round after dismal round of bloodshed, crisis, instability and terror.

In the past, visionary leaders such as Anwar al-Sadat, Yitzhak Rabin and King Hussein of Jordan bravely and selflessly devoted themselves to the cause of peace. The question for our generation is simple and stark: whether history will consign us to the ranks of those who let hatred and grievance linger, or whether history will honour us with a place in the camp of the peacemakers. The United States has made its choice. We ask you all to stand with us. Together, let us stand for lasting peace.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Shintaro Ito, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Japan.

Mr. Ito (Japan): On behalf of the Government of Japan, I extend our deepest appreciation to the Government of the Russian Federation for organizing this important meeting. I would also like to express our gratitude for the work of the Secretary-General and the Quartet to date.

The Middle East peace process is at a critical juncture, with new political developments on many fronts. Japan believes that the Security Council should continue to play a constructive role in the Middle East peace process.

We sincerely hope that the new Israeli Government will strive for the realization of a Middle East peace based on the two-State solution. We strongly call on the Israeli Government to fulfil its obligations under the Road Map and Security Council resolution 1850 (2008). Japan expects that the Government of Israel will strive to achieve a peace in the Middle East by overcoming the current obstacles in cooperation with the international community.

Improving the humanitarian conditions in Gaza is a top priority for all of us. From that perspective, it is necessary to keep the crossings open continuously. At the same time, we condemn the sporadic rocket attacks on Israel, which undermine not only the security of Israeli citizens but also the efforts for the reconstruction of Gaza and the peace process. Here again, I call on the parties to fulfil their obligations under Council resolution 1860 (2009).

To realize a comprehensive, just and lasting peace, it is also indispensable for the Arab States to play a more active role. The Arab Peace Initiative can serve as a solid foundation for a comprehensive Middle East peace.

At the International Conference in Support of the Palestinian Economy for the Reconstruction of Gaza, in which I participated, Japan pledged $200 million in assistance to the Palestinians. Japan is supporting the efforts of the Palestinians under the Palestinian Authority led by President Abbas to build a viable national economy through the "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity" initiative and other projects, in order to realize the establishment of a Palestinian State comprising the West Bank and Gaza.

Japan also has been actively engaged in the Middle East peace process through its diplomatic efforts. Foreign Minister Nakasone visited the region last week. In Egypt he reiterated our unchanged support for Egyptian efforts for the realization of peace based on the two-State solution. Mr. Tatsuo Arima, our Special Envoy for the Middle East, also visited Israel and the Palestinian territories last week to assist in reinvigorating the peace process.

Last November, a historic series of high-level meetings of the General Assembly was held here in New York, with the attendance of leaders from around the world, including those of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, as well as our Special Envoy, Mr. Koumura. At the meeting, the leaders stressed that peace could only be cultivated through dialogue and tolerance. In that regard, I wish to stress the importance of a balanced approach in pursuing peace. There are many factors underlying conflicts, such as poverty and despair. Resorting to force will not be the ultimate solution to these problems. We need to help ensure a

decent standard of living for those in dire situations and work to achieve economic prosperity and improve the quality of education. Values such as pluralism, multiculturalism, tolerance and moderation are required in order to achieve peace. They can be developed through dialogue among civilizations. I believe that our efforts to that end will benefit generations to come.

Over the course of our history, Japan has always aspired to accommodate differences and learn to coexist with others. Differences should not lead to mutual estrangement, but rather should serve as a catalyst for enriching a society. We believe with conviction that the ultimate goal of diplomacy is to create a global society in which people of different cultures, religions and ideologies can live together in peace.

We hope to be a reliable partner of the parties to the Middle East peace process. Japan believes it has a constructive role to play in the achievement of peace and prosperity in the region. We will do whatever we can in the form of financial as well as intellectual contributions. We will maintain our commitment to the two-State solution, which will make it possible for Israelis and Palestinians to live side by side in peace.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Davor Božinović, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Croatia.

Mr. Božinović (Croatia): Let me begin by thanking the Secretary-General for his statement and expressing my country's appreciation for the personal efforts he has invested in helping to advance the Middle East peace process. Let me also express our gratitude to Foreign Minister Lavrov and his delegation for organizing this timely debate, which focuses our attention on the need to reinvigorate diplomatic action on reaching a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East.

In many of its aspects, the Arab-Israeli conflict remains the defining conflict of our time. Tension and turbulence in the region often reverberate globally. Conversely, the dynamics on the international scene have not always been conducive to achieving a solution. We deem this to be an opportune moment that provides the right context and momentum, which should be harnessed to achieve a final and lasting peace.

At the heart of this lies the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. While respecting its essentially bilateral nature, we also recognize that unwavering international support to the process and to the parties' efforts is critical in creating the political context for successful negotiations.

We should also not lose sight of the regional dimension of the process. For its part, Croatia values the efforts of responsible regional partners towards securing a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, including the Arab Peace Initiative. We recognize and commend the role played by the United States in this regard and are encouraged by the early and principled engagement of President Obama's Administration with regional actors, including with both the Palestinians and the Israelis.

Today's meeting comes at a critical time when all efforts should be channelled into preserving this momentum and creating an environment that would allow the parties to continue to build on the progress achieved, guided by the principles and mutual understanding reflected in resolution 1850 (2008), which the Council adopted last December.

Last year, we witnessed the evolution of a comprehensive, direct and results-oriented Israeli-Palestinian negotiating process within the framework set out at Annapolis. There was also the opening of important regional tracks between Israel and Syria and between Syria and Lebanon. Despite the recent impasse, we cannot afford to lose the momentum that has been achieved. We therefore welcome the Russian initiative to provide new impetus for a comprehensive peace process, on both the Israeli-Palestinian and the Syrian-Lebanese tracks, primarily through preparations for the Moscow conference.

For Croatia, resolution 1850 (2008) remains an important benchmark. It emphasizes the irreversibility of the peace talks and the need to advance the process under the Annapolis guiding principles, as well as the need to intensify efforts to foster mutual recognition and peaceful coexistence in the region. I would like to reiterate here our belief in the ongoing peace process based on a regional approach and on a two-State solution — a democratic and peaceful Palestine living side by side with a democratic and secure Israel — and in the need to advance the momentum towards just, lasting and comprehensive peace for the Middle East.

It is important that the parties continue to engage in direct and substantive negotiations at all levels and that they receive our full support along that journey. We recognize the challenges that the parties face on that journey, even more so now in the wake of the recent conflict in Gaza and the sensitive period of political transition. We welcome the opportunity that the formation of the new Israeli Government can bring in providing for the resumption and consolidation of the peace talks.

We also understand that the dynamics in Gaza cannot be separated from the broader picture and the efforts towards achieving a comprehensive peace. Gaza remains in dire and urgent need of humanitarian and reconstruction assistance. Despite encouraging donor responses in the aftermath of the crisis, we are mindful that reconstruction and the long-term recovery and development of Gaza depend principally on a stable and secure environment, which in turn remains critical for the sustained opening of Gaza crossings, as requested in resolution 1860 (2009).

Moreover, the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009), which includes putting an end to arms smuggling and the capacity of Hamas and other militant groups to launch attacks against Israel, is critical for attaining a durable ceasefire. In that regard, let me reiterate our appreciation for international and regional efforts, notably those of Egypt.

The aftermath of the crisis in Gaza has highlighted the significance of intra-Palestinian reconciliation. We support efforts to that end and would support a Palestinian Government that renounces violence and respects previous agreements and obligations, as well as the Quartet principles.

As the political and diplomatic processes remain inextricably linked with the situation on the ground, we hope to see tangible changes in accordance with the obligations to which both parties committed themselves under the Road Map, which were reaffirmed at Annapolis. We also hope that both parties will refrain from all measures that risk prejudging the outcome of negotiations or eroding trust and confidence.

Furthermore, we understand that development and peace are mutually reinforcing and that economic development is an essential part of a lasting solution. Here too, sustained international engagement remains critical, both to stimulate Palestinian economic renewal and for the reform processes, notably in the sphere of security and the rule of law. The ability of the Palestinian Authority to build credible institutions and a security infrastructure that is willing and able to combat terrorism and anarchy remains an essential element of Palestinian State-building and a legitimate expectation on the Israeli side.

We understand, through personal experience from our region, that the current period is beset by challenges for both the Israeli and the Palestinian sides. This makes it all the more important that the international community, including this Council and the active Quartet, continue to encourage the parties to persist in their efforts towards achieving the shared goals of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace for the Middle East, with two States, a democratic and peaceful Palestine living side by side with a democratic and secure Israel.

Before finishing, my delegation would also like to thank the Russian delegation for preparing the draft presidential statement that we are about to adopt and other Council delegations for the constructive position and flexibility shown in bringing this consensus text together.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Le Luong Minh, Permanent Representative and Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam.

Mr. Le Luong Minh (Viet Nam): On behalf of the Government of Viet Nam, I would like to start by thanking you, Mr. President, and the Government of the Russian Federation for taking the initiative of organizing this important debate of the Council. We welcome the presence of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and thank him for his statement.

This debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, is taking place at a critical juncture, when recent positive developments are being overshadowed by continued insecurity, instability and increasing tensions in the region. We are heartened by the increasing international consensus rejecting violence in support of a peaceful solution; the positive outcome of the International Conference in Support of the Palestinian Economy for the Reconstruction of Gaza, held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, in early March 2009; and the continued undertakings to translate such a positive outcome into concrete actions in support of the National Early

Recovery and Reconstruction Plan for Gaza presented by the Palestinian Government.

These positive developments, however, cannot overshadow the extent and scope of challenges facing the international community. We note with great concern that, more than three months since the temporary ceasefire was announced, Israeli military incursions into the occupied Palestinian territory and rocket attacks against populated areas in Israel continue to take place. While Palestinian civilians in Gaza are struggling to cope with the numerous hardships and difficulties caused by the 22-month siege, tensions in the West Bank continue to escalate as a result of Israel's expansion of illegal settlements and construction of the separation wall.

Repeated cycles of violence and counter-violence over the years demonstrate more clearly than ever that a lasting solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict must be a comprehensive one that takes into account the legitimate interests and rights of all the parties concerned. We support the collective efforts of the United Nations, the Quartet, the League of Arab States and regional countries in search of a two-State solution based on internationally recognized guidelines such as the Road Map, the Annapolis outcome, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the relevant Security Council resolutions, including the recent resolutions 1850 (2008) and 1860 (2009). Viet Nam is ready to join efforts to reactivate and move forward the Middle East peace process.

The recent tragic events in Gaza have caused the loss of many innocent lives, including those of women and children, and created and prolonged a humanitarian crisis, making the living conditions of the Palestinian people there more and more difficult. We urge all the parties concerned to lift all restrictions, create every condition necessary to facilitate humanitarian relief operations, and abide by international humanitarian and human rights law. We commend United Nations agencies, particularly the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and other humanitarian organizations for their bravery in rendering emergency and humanitarian assistance to Gazans. While reaffirming Viet Nam's position that any attack against diplomatic and United Nations premises and personnel is unacceptable, we take note of the report of the Board of Inquiry, prepared at the request of the Secretary-General and the appeal of the Security Council, and support investigations to determine the culprits.

Intra-Palestinian unity is an important factor for making the Middle East peace process sustainable. Continuing our support for the Palestinian National Authority, we hope that all Palestinian parties will soon reconcile and establish a national unity Government.

We are pleased to note the relative calm and stability prevailing in Lebanon since the signing of the Doha agreement a year ago. We hope that the parliamentary elections scheduled for 7 June 2009 will be held in optimal conditions of security, transparency and fairness. We reaffirm our support for a solution achieved through dialogue and cooperation on the basis of respect for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon. We would also like to reaffirm our support for the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

Finally, we welcome the proposal of Russia to convene an international conference on the Middle East peace process in Moscow later this year. We thank the Russian delegation for introducing the draft presidential statement, which, with flexibility and a spirit of cooperation, we are ready to support.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Representative of Mexico.

Mr. Heller (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to start by thanking the Secretary-General for his presence here today and for the report he has given us on the situation in the Middle East. I would also like to thank His Excellency Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, for having convened this important ministerial meeting on the Middle East in a timely fashion, bearing in mind the current political dynamics in the key States in the region. I welcome the presence of the ministers, deputy ministers and permanent representatives who are here with us today.

Mexico believes that the establishment of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders on the basis of Security Council resolutions, is the only solution for lasting prosperity and peace between Israelis and Palestinians and more generally in the Middle East. In that spirit and conviction, Mexico has participated in international

efforts for peace, in particular the Annapolis conference, which seemed promising in its time in terms of making progress in this process. We will continue to actively support such initiatives, which will make it possible to arrive at a definitive settlement of the peace process in the Middle East.

Mexico also supports the efforts of the Quartet to create conditions favourable to relaunching the peace process and Security Council initiatives to ensure the implementation of its relevant resolutions on the basis of a consensus position. The delegation of Mexico would like to express its resolute willingness to work with the Russian Federation and the international community to promote the exchange of creative ideas on crafting new strategies that will make it possible to overcome obstacles and achieve progress in the peace process with all the urgency required by the situation.

Despite recent efforts, the situation in the Middle East remains critical. We see trends running counter to the peace process and to a lasting solution to the conflicts in the region; these are a cause of concern for my delegation. We can affirm that the necessary political conditions for a long-term understanding are lacking at this juncture.

In Gaza and southern Israel, despite the unilateral cessation of hostilities, outbreaks of violence in the field are still being reported and rocket attacks and the consequent reprisals and incursions by the Israeli armed forces in the Gaza Strip have continued. The difficulty of access for humanitarian aid and the severe restrictions on the supply of building materials, fuel and cash in Gaza have caused living conditions to significantly and continuously deteriorate, further generating a feeling of frustration and injustice that considerably affects the aspirations of the populations of the region and the international community as a whole.

In the West Bank, there are also reports of clashes between Palestinians and Israeli settlers, incursions of the Israeli armed forces and terrorist attacks on the Israeli civilian population living in the surrounding areas. Similarly, restrictions on the free movement of people who live in that area remain, and the demolition and settlement policy in East Jerusalem and the West Bank continues.

My delegation again condemns all acts of violence, especially those directed against the civilian population, and urges all actors to comply with the provisions of international humanitarian law at all times.

We thank the Secretary-General for his executive summary to the Security Council on the report of the Board of Inquiry on the attacks on United Nations installations during the recent conflict in Gaza. My delegation hopes that in due course the report will be examined in detail by the Security Council itself.

We note that, in the present circumstances, the peace process not only may remain stagnant, but even runs the risk of reverting to the status quo ante, which would be unacceptable. The Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority must show the necessary will to resume negotiations as soon as possible and to put an end to the spiral of tension and violence that has characterized this region of the world during the past months.

Also, without question, the support of the neighbouring States and of the entire international community is necessary to overcome this obstacle to the peace process. To that end, the provisions of the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 1850 (2008) and 1860 (2009), must be implemented without reservation.

My delegation is concerned that the resolutions adopted by the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East have not been fully implemented. The maintenance of international peace and security is the fundamental purpose of the United Nations, and Member States have agreed to respect and ensure respect for decisions aimed at achieving that objective, in keeping with the spirit and the letter of the United Nations Charter.

Similarly, both parties will have to comply with all the main elements of the Road Map and to avoid undertaking actions that undermine trust and affect the negotiations process. In that regard, we particularly regret that the colonization, demolition and settlement activities continue in the Palestinian territories, since they infringe on the principles of the Road Map and threaten the peace process as a whole.

It is also essential that the efforts towards achieving intra-Palestinian reconciliation, fostered with the support of the Government of Egypt, continue. Only the creation of a united, democratic Palestinian Government committed to the peace process, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, can

lay the foundations for a peace process leading to a final solution to the conflict.

It is important to underscore the need for the support of international community in achieving tangible progress in the peace process. To that end, we welcome the efforts undertaken by the Quartet, in particular by United States President Barack Obama, to direct the parties to resume dialogue. We trust that the convening of an international conference in Moscow will, when it takes place, help to re-establish the bases for dialogue and negotiation.

We also welcome the commitment reaffirmed by King Abdullah II of Jordan in favour of a "57-State solution", thus demonstrating that peace can be achieved only through a joint effort. It also confirms the central position that the Arab Peace Initiative must hold in that process. We also recall the relevance of fulfilling the commitments made during the Sharm el-Sheikh conference last March, which are fundamental to the reconstruction of Gaza and the normalization of the lives of its inhabitants.

As the delegation of Mexico has repeatedly suggested, reconstruction and access for humanitarian aid will be possible only through the establishment of a monitoring mechanism that guarantees a lasting ceasefire, the opening of the border crossings and control of the illicit arms trade.

In parallel, it is essential that efforts towards achieving regional peace continue. We invite Israel and Syria to resume their indirect talks, which had been under the auspices of Turkey, and we call on Israel, Lebanon and Syria to fully comply with the provisions of resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006). The normalization of relations among those neighbouring countries and withdrawal from the occupied territories will have a positive impact on the peaceful settlement of the conflict.

In the current context, the most substantial momentum that can be leant to the peace process must come from the actors directly involved in it. To that end, we urge Israel and the Palestinian Authority to hold a constructive dialogue without preconditions, on the basis of previous international agreements and obligations. We hope that in the coming weeks the political conditions to achieve that goal will be established.

The Security Council will have to ensure that both parties follow the guidelines of the Road Map, whose end objective is the establishment of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to express its support for adoption of the presidential statement drafted by the Russian Federation, which is an extremely timely and appropriate contribution towards promoting dialogue and negotiation to establish long-term regional peace. Mexico is ready to support and to actively participate in any initiative leading to the lasting settlement of one of the main conflicts on today's agenda, one that has an impact on international peace, security and stability.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Uganda.

Mr. Ruganda (Uganda): My delegation welcomes you, Mr. President, the Secretary-General and the Ministers present here to this debate on the Middle East. We thank you for organizing this debate at this time and at this level. It is a clear testimony to the commitment of the Security Council and of the international community to the ongoing efforts towards the resolution of the Middle East conflicts and towards ensuring lasting peace and security in the region.

We also welcome the Secretary-General and thank him for his briefing on the overall situation in the Middle East, the progress made so far, the challenges and what more needs to be done. Uganda commends the efforts and initiatives of the Quartet, Egypt, the Arab League and other actors in that regard.

We are convinced that a durable solution to the Middle East conflict can be achieved only through negotiations and agreement among the parties concerned. We continue to support all the parties in the Middle East in their efforts to achieve a comprehensive peace based on the vision of a region in which two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders, as envisaged in resolution 1860 (2009). We call upon both the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority to remain committed to the irreversibility of the peace process, based on previous agreements and obligations.

With regard to the situation in Gaza, my delegation is encouraged by the reduction in the

number of incidents since the most recent briefing on this subject. We welcome the summary report of the Secretary-General and the Board of Inquiry. However, we are concerned at the fact that the situation remains fragile. There is still no permanent ceasefire, there remain incidents of violence, and the levels of humanitarian assistance reaching Gaza are below what is urgently required. There is an urgent need for a durable and fully respected ceasefire, for an end to arms smuggling and for the reopening of crossing points, as envisioned in resolution 1860 (2009).

We reiterate our commendation of Egypt and other parties for the role that they continue to play in facilitating the ceasefire talks between Israel and Palestine. We are also concerned that the divisions among Palestinian groups persist, and we call upon them to resolve their differences through dialogue and to reconcile and forge a common front.

We note with concern that, while $4.5 billion were pledged in March this year during the International Conference in Support of the Palestinian Economy for the Reconstruction of Gaza, the provision of immediately needed materials for construction has not been possible, owing mainly to the blockade. We therefore call upon all parties concerned to ensure that those pledges are honoured and used for Gaza reconstruction programmes.

The situation in the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory also raises concern. We note from the briefing that there has been a significant rise in settler activities both in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem. We therefore call for an end to all settler activities.

With regard to Lebanon, Uganda welcomes the improvement in the political and security situations. We commend the steps taken to improve relations between Lebanon and Syria, including the establishment of diplomatic relations. My delegation also welcomes the commitment of the Lebanese leadership to free and fair parliamentary elections, scheduled for 7 June.

We urgently need to give new impetus to the search for a solution to the conflict in the Middle East. In that regard, Uganda fully supports the proposal by the Russian Federation to convene, in consultation with the Quartet and other parties, an international conference on the Middle East peace process in Moscow this year.

Finally, Uganda wishes to thank the Russian delegation for the draft presidential statement, which Uganda fully supports.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Representative of China.

Mr. Zhang Yesui (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I am greatly honoured to attend this Security Council meeting on the Middle East as Special Envoy to Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi. I wish to thank the Government of the Russian Federation for this initiative and you personally, Mr. President, for presiding over today's meeting. My thanks go also to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing on the current situation in the Middle East.

Resolution 1860 (2009), adopted by the Security Council in January this year, is the result of arduous efforts by all parties. It brought about the Israeli-Palestinian ceasefire and created conditions for a resumption of the Middle East peace process. Regrettably, however, the resolution has not been implemented comprehensively or effectively. Israel should open the border crossings to Gaza in order to facilitate reconstruction efforts and improve access to Gaza for humanitarian supplies in order to ease the humanitarian crisis there. Israel should also put an end to its ongoing construction of settlements in the West Bank. Palestine should strengthen its internal unity and reconciliation process. The parties concerned must avoid the use of force, prevent civilian casualties and ensure the implementation of resolution 1860 (2009).

Political negotiation is the only path towards a lasting peace in the Middle East; the use of force will not achieve it. To the contrary, the cycle of violence will only exacerbate hatred and confrontation. The situation in the Middle East is now at a very critical stage. We hope that the parties concerned will hold firm in their determination to resolve the issue through political negotiations and refrain from any action that could undermine mutual trust and reconciliation in order to create conditions for a resumption of negotiations.

At the core of the Middle East issue is the Palestinian question. The ultimate solution to the Palestinian question is the realization of the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace. The parties concerned should continue to act in the spirit enshrined in the relevant United Nations resolutions and adhere to the principle of land for

peace and the two-State solution. They should press for the early achievement of reconciliation between Israel and Palestine, the establishment of an independent State of Palestine, and peaceful coexistence between Arabs and Jews. We hope that both Israel and Palestine will bear in mind the fundamental interests of their peoples and make the right choice.

The achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East depends on the resolution of all relevant issues in the region. The negotiations between Syria and Israel and between Lebanon and Israel are important components of the Middle East peace process. They should be promoted as part of a holistic approach. At the same time, other volatile issues in the region should also be appropriately addressed in order to create an external environment favourable to the peace process.

The Middle East process cannot succeed without the assistance and support of the international community, which should continue to support the development of Palestine and immediately fulfil its commitment to reconstruction in Gaza. The parties concerned should uphold justice and strengthen mediation while, at the same time, considering the establishment of a broadly representative, balanced and effective multilateral mechanism to provide oversight and support for the Middle East peace process.

China supports the efforts of the Quartet. We welcome any initiative that will contribute to the Middle East peace process. We support Russia's proposal to hold an international conference on the Middle East in Moscow.

China always attaches great importance to the issue of the Middle East and is committed to promoting the peace process there. Chinese leaders have worked vigorously to promote peace and negotiations in the region through frequent communications with leaders of the countries concerned.

Two weeks ago, Chinese Minister for Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi visited Egypt, Palestine, Israel and Syria, where he had in-depth exchanges of views of the leaders of those countries and with the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States on the Middle East peace process. He put forward China's proposals on how to promote the Middle East peace process and provided further assistance to Palestine for its reconstruction efforts.

China will continue to work with the rest of the international community for the early and appropriate settlement of the Middle East issue and will play a constructive role in the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

Mr. Shalgham (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, at the outset, I would like to express my gratitude to you for your initiative to hold this meeting of the Security Council at the level of Ministers for Foreign Affairs to discuss the situation in the Middle East. I also thank the Secretary-General for his presence among us and for his statement.

The problem referred to as "the Middle East issue" started over 60 years ago, and yet, despite the passage of those 60 years, it has not grown old. It is still as urgent, complicated and severe as if it were only 60 months or 60 days old.

At the centre of the so-called Middle East problem is the Palestinian people, who were evicted from their land, rendered homeless and scattered throughout the world. Those among the Palestinian people who remain in Palestine have seen their rights denied, their homes demolished, their identity destroyed and their farms uprooted and razed, and thousands of them are now held in Israeli prisons. And now, at a time when the resistance of the Palestinian people against this occupation, this violence, this expulsion, this destruction and this imprisonment is being criminalized, we find on the opposite side, in Israel, an increased push towards extremism and the denial of the rights of others, as well as a growing spirit of hatred towards Palestinians and the entire Arab people.

Today, we face a new Government in Israel, whose diplomacy is led by a man who does not even bother to hide his hatred for Arabs and who had once called for the destruction of Egypt's Aswan High Dam and for the expulsion of the Palestinians from Palestine.

At a time when some people describe the Government elected by all Palestinians as an extremist Government, when some countries have put that Government on a list of terrorist governments, and when the resistance movement in Lebanon is described

as terrorist, we do not hear anybody describing as extremist or terrorist Israeli Governments that launch wars, kill, destroy, uproot and raze farmlands and build a racist separation wall.

Since the Oslo Accords, the Palestinians, through the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, have been moving step by step in negotiations and peace talks with the Israelis. They have been moving from one international forum to another in the name of peace and in pursuit of a resolution of the Palestinian question. But what has the end result been?

On the Israeli side, we have an increase in the construction of settlements and the destruction of Palestinian homes, and today, in Jerusalem alone, more than 60,000 Palestinians face the destruction of their homes and who will be rendered homeless. Excavations under the Al-Aqsa mosque continue today, with the goal of destroying and completely removing the mosque. Israel also plans to construct an underground railway near the mosque.

The Arab Peace Initiative, which is now six years old, has been completely ignored by the Israelis. They want to take everything: they want the land, security and peace, and they offer nothing in return. The Israelis reject the return of Palestinian refugees to their homeland; they refuse to give up weapons of mass destruction, which they continue to accumulate in their arsenals; they refuse to withdraw from the Golan; they reject a Palestinian State, which, in fact, is impossible to establish because Israel has taken the land and water sources, destroyed the infrastructure and imprisoned the Palestinian people.

There are now more than 11,000 Palestinians in Israeli jails, and we hear no discussion of their suffering or of the importance of releasing them. In the West Bank alone, there are more than 600 Israeli checkpoints, which make the daily lives of Palestinians an ongoing, continuous torture.

At the end of last year and early this year, Israel launched a comprehensive war against the Gaza Strip. The international conscience agrees that Israel's actions constituted war crimes which affected all segments of the civilian population. Thousands were killed or wounded, and internationally banned weapons were used. While we express our appreciation for the Board of Inquiry and the fact-finding mission concerning the Israeli aggression against Gaza, and specifically against United Nations facilities in Gaza, my delegation has also prepared a draft resolution to establish an impartial investigating committee to hold Israeli officials accountable and bring them to justice. We also look forward to the report of the independent fact-finding mission that was set up by the Human Rights Council to investigate all Israeli crimes in Gaza during the aggression.

Today, we need to raise the voice of right and the voice of courage. Humanity has entered the twenty-first century. We need a voice that calls for the renunciation of violence and war and the killing of man by his fellow man. We must all confront and stand up to all forms of racism.

Muslims, Jews and Christians lived together in Al-Andalus — Audalusia — for many centuries. They lived in unprecedented brotherhood, and together they produced a civilization that laid the groundwork for a historic human renaissance that helped to take humanity from the darkness of the Middle Ages to the enlightenment and progress of recent centuries.

We therefore say today that we need to reproduce the Al-Andalus experience, which we believe we are capable of doing. That civilization was built on coexistence, tolerance and acceptance of the other.

With full appreciation for the initiatives, resolutions and plans seeking to resolve what we call the Middle East question, and based on a spirit of coexistence, our brother and leader Muammar Al-Qadhafi has published in the *White Book* his vision for a true solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. That vision includes the creation of a democratic State in Palestine where everyone lives equally, without discrimination based on religion or race. In that State, violence, confrontation and denial of the other would end. My country has confidence in the ability of the international community and of noble humanity to realize that dream, just as the dream of coexistence was realized in South Africa.

The *White Book*, written by our leader Muammar Al-Qadhafi, contains a chapter entitled "Isratine", describing a time when everybody in Palestine — Arabs and Jews — shall share equally in the land, water, freedom, and even the name of the State, as happened when African Tanganyika and Arab-origin Zanzibar were merged into one State called Tanzania.

In conclusion, although we do not agree with much of the content of the draft presidential statement submitted to us because it does not adequately address the issues of Israeli settlements, the occupation of the Golan Heights, the situation in Gaza and the Sheba'a Farms, in appreciation of the good intentions and positive attitude demonstrated in the preparation of the draft presidential statement, in recognition of my country's relationship with Russia and in order to preserve the unity and consensus of the Council, we will not object to the presidential statement.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): After consultations among the members of the Security Council, I have been authorized to make the following statement on behalf of the Council:

"The Security Council stressed the urgency of reaching comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Vigorous diplomatic action is needed to attain the goal set by the international community — lasting peace in the region, based on an enduring commitment to mutual recognition, freedom from violence, incitement and terror, and the two-State solution, building upon previous agreements and obligations.

"In this context, the Security Council recalls all its previous resolutions on the Middle East, in particular resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003), 1850 (2008), 1860 (2009), and the Madrid principles, and the Council notes the importance of the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative.

"The Security Council encourages the Quartet's ongoing work to support the parties in their efforts to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

"The Security Council reiterates its commitment to the irreversibility of the bilateral negotiations built upon previous agreements and obligations. The Council reiterates its call for renewed and urgent efforts by the parties and the international community to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on the vision of a region where two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders.

"The Security Council further calls upon the parties to fulfil their obligations under the Performance-Based Road Map, refraining from any steps that could undermine confidence or prejudice the outcome of negotiations on all core issues.

"The Security Council calls on all States and international organizations to support the Palestinian Government that is committed to the Quartet principles and the Arab Peace Initiative and respects the commitments of the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Council encourages tangible steps towards intra-Palestinian reconciliation, including in support of Egypt's efforts, on this basis. It calls for assistance to help develop the Palestinian economy, to maximize the resources available to the Palestinian Authority and to build Palestinian institutions.

"The Security Council supports the proposal of the Russian Federation to convene, in consultation with the Quartet and the parties, an international conference on the Middle East peace process in Moscow in 2009."

This statement will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2009/14.

There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on the agenda.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.